



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### **About...Human Papillomavirus (HPV)**

##### **What is HPV?**

Genital human papillomavirus (also called HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). There are more than 40 HPV types that can infect the genital areas of males and females. These HPV types can also infect the mouth and throat. Most people who become infected with HPV do not even know they have it.

##### **How is HPV spread?**

HPV can be spread through genital contact, oral sex, vaginal sex or anal sex, even when the infected partner has no signs or symptoms. A person can have HPV even if years have passed since he or she had sexual contact with an infected person. Most infected persons do not realize they are infected or that they are passing the virus on to a sex partner. Very rarely, a pregnant woman with genital HPV can pass HPV to her baby during delivery.

##### **Who is at risk for HPV?**

Genital HPV is a common virus that is passed from one person to another through direct skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. Most sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never even know it. HPV infection is most common in people in their late teens and early 20s.

##### **How do I know if I have HPV?**

Most people with HPV have no symptoms.

##### **What are the symptoms of HPV?**

Most people with HPV do not develop symptoms or health problems from it. In 90% of cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally within two years. But sometimes, certain types of HPV can cause genital warts in males and females. Other HPV types can cause cervical cancer. These types can also cause other, less common but serious cancers, including cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and head and neck (tongue, tonsils and throat).

### **How is HPV treated?**

There is no treatment for the virus itself, but there *are* treatments for the diseases that HPV can cause, like genital warts and cervical cancer.

### **How can HPV be prevented?**

There are several ways that people can lower their chances of getting HPV:

- Vaccines can protect males and females against some of the most common types of HPV. These vaccines are given in three shots. It is important to get all three doses to get the best protection. The vaccines are most effective when given before a person's first sexual contact, when he or she could be exposed to HPV. The vaccines are recommended for 11 and 12 year-old boys and girls. They can also be given to males and females 13 through 26 years of age who did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. These vaccines can also be given to children as young as 9 years of age.
- People can also lower their chances of getting HPV by being in a faithful relationship with one partner; limiting their number of sex partners; and choosing a partner who has had no or few prior sex partners. But even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV.
- For those who choose to be sexually active, condoms may lower the risk of HPV. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom - so condoms may not *fully* protect against HPV.

See your doctor to decide if you need a vaccine against HPV.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm>

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